Mr. Speaker, just last month, the Iraqi

people, including large numbers of Sunni Iraqis, voted in a referendum

on their Constitution. The Iraqi people are choosing to participate in

the political process that can eventually undermine support for the

indigenous insurgency in Iraq.

The next step in building Iraq's political future is elections in

December under this new, completely Iraqi Constitution. Broad

participation in these elections will continue to build political

momentum for a new self-governing Iraq at peace with its neighbors.

While the political process moves forward, the United States and its

allies must continue to train Iraqi police and security forces so that

week by week, month by month, more neighborhoods, towns and provinces

are patrolled and controlled by Iraqis.

We must also continue to conduct military operations against

insurgents and foreign fighters in Iraq, particularly al Qaeda in Iraq.

There are still difficult days ahead and much work to be done--much of

it done by our men and women in the military.

I expect U.S. forces will continue to stay in Iraq through December's

elections at roughly their current level. But as I've said, if

political and security progress continues on roughly the course we are

on, American forces should be able to start being drawn down in

significant numbers during the course of next year. These redeployments

should be based on conditions in the field. As the Iraqis stand up, we

can stand down.

After September 11, 2001, we made a decision to play offense in

fighting the war on terror, to track down enemies who would kill

Americans and give them no place to hide. Our troops are doing a

fantastic job, and terrorists know they have no hope of defeating our

troops in the field. They know that the center of gravity in their

fight is to undermine the will of the American people.

I would rather have American soldiers hunting down terrorists over

there, than have American firefighters and police officers responding

to attacks here at home.